

Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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Discussion

Early Years of CMM

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) at USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) in 2003 right as U.S. government efforts in Afghanistan were ramping up. The CMM office at the time was quite small under the leadership of (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C). During these early years, the issues surrounding Afghanistan were so politically charged CMM would have been overwhelmed had they got into the issue. However, from the sidelines, CMM did advocate for an analysis-first approach but since the issues around Afghanistan were too radioactive CMM stayed away.

The thinking at the time was that Afghanistan and Iraq were so politically charged that we would overwhelmed and that there wasn't enough staff or resources to deal with them. It was sort of radioactive.

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Establishing CMM and the Creation of CAF

The CMM office was started absent a preexisting conflict assessment framework, and in fact, was established to focus on creating the Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF) - establishing CMM and drafting the CAF meant pulling together all the best thinking on assessments.

There wasn't even a CAF 1.0. We tended to focus our efforts on developing one for countries where it could be the most useful. The office at that time was a place for pulling together the best technical thinking on the subject of conflict.

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Ultimately, when CAF 1.0 launched it was launched under the existing policy directive that every country needed to conduct a conflict assessment (he believed this policy directive was a holdover from the Clinton years). Every country mission ended up conducting a conflict assessment but each country sent in a different version of an assessment; some sent in a few paragraphs after talking to a political counselor, while others conducted much more rigorous assessments and even consulted universities.

We did eventually launch CAF 1.0. We were still operating under a policy directive that every country needed to conduct a conflict assessment. But what that meant in practice varied because there was no specific framework. It meant that some offices just sent a paragraph or something.

The early years were quite busy and the initial conflict assessments were conducted in locations where they had influence, such as the Balkans, Africa, and Latin America. After the initial rollout it became evident that there was a disappointment with the uptake of the assessments' findings. The staff began to wonder what the nature of the problem was. Was it the CAF itself? Was it because of the quality of people they sent out to conduct the assessments? Was it the customers who were receiving the data? Was it the unresponsive programs? The conclusion was that it was a mix thereof and no single source was to blame.

In 2007 or 2008, CMM conducted training programs for mainly USAID personnel (mainly DC staff, but for some field staff as well). The training focused on making the participants aware of conflict dynamics in general, what conflict assessment was and the various aspects of it, and how to move from the analytic approach forward.

CAF Stalls, Enter CAF V.2.0

Initial appropriations [for CMM operations] were limited and thus the office had to shift toward other sectors, such as education, democracy & governance, and show them how to be conflict sensitive and the merits of the do no harm approach. Since CMM had so few resources, they could not take the lead and push out conflict assessment to the wider community. In one example, they did training on CAF in Sri Lanka and that training ended up being the motivation to move from CAF to CAF V2.0. Some of the problems they encountered were how the trainings were being conducted and the fact that the assessments were merely a snapshot (further complicated by time delays in analysis and rollout). The development of CAF V2.0 brought with it the notion of trends and a more dynamic feeling - both of which increased the shelf life of the assessments. CAF V2.0 clarified the dynamic nature of conflict and where to target interventions. The strategy then became using conflict assessment tools where missions could use them.

In 2010, they issued new guidance on CDSC—Country Development Strategy...We were coming up with a compelling vision but it was really difficult for missions to make the connections between the implications of the assessments and the mission plan.

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From 2007 to 2010, five-year strategies were a normal fixture but in 2010 this changed. It changed as a result of USAID getting more absorbed into the Department of State (DOS) and ultimately the conflict assessment effort was dropped. Once they stopped, DOS could still request a conflict assessment but it was not mandated. Also in 2010, USAID resumed the old program cycle with a return to a Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). This shift meant that there was no place for conflict assessment to be plugged into within a mission. CAF V2.0 responded to a gap between analysis and uptake of the analysis by the program.

Two New Lists

To focus people more toward the issue of conflict, they focused on two new efforts. The first was the creation of the **Alert List** concept. The idea was conceived in 2004 and the first issue was issued around 2005. Since then there have been about 10 alert lists issued. The Alert List was a homegrown effort until they decided to bring in the University of Maryland (UofM) as a contractor. With the help of UofM, they began producing two Alert Lists a year and developed a model that was predictive of conflict. The model was a linear regression and would look at possibilities of issues like genocide, political violence.

The inputs were open source; it was based on predictive models of countries at risk of violent conflict. It built on a linear regression model(b)(3)

the USAID Alert List was labeled as 'Sensitive But Unclassified' (SBU) since it was derived from open sources and thus was able to be shared with anyone who had a .gov or .mil email address. USAID kept their list as SBU since it could be politically sensitive to other countries. Of note, UofM also publishes a version of the Alert List every two years in a fully unclassified publication.

The second effort was the operationalizing of fragility strategy. We came up with a model for measuring instability and state fragility. These studies looked at which states were fragile by measuring effectiveness and legitimacy. The studies had roughly 32 variables half which focused on effectiveness and half focused on legitimacy. Under these columns each variable was then categorized as social, economic, political or security related and placed in a grid roughly four variable per category. The countries were then scored based on these variables and now CMM has roughly 20 years of data on fragile states. He emphasized his frustration in regard to this effort since it was great work but it is kept behind a firewall and not well known. The fragility reports were briefed at the Pentagon and well received. Also now USAID has been publishing them for 12 years and have set an expectation on their publication of them.

Fragility studies, while helpful on many fronts, help CMM prioritize their own resources with conducting conflict assessments. They also are another tool get the mission directors and leadership of regional bureaus to focus on countries which are atop both lists (Alert List and Fragility Study). When countries are both fragile and have certain political characteristics, they are considered vulnerable. Both lists are also useful with the development of country strategies and if a country ranks high on both lists, missions should take the next steps to conduct a conflict assessment and ideally work with CMM to prepare the best strategy to do so. CMM has a few cases of this happening, but since the PPL bureau did not want to impose certain analysis on missions, it was left up to each mission to decide to do a conflict assessment or not...it was ad hoc. There are currently strategic planning reviews going on now and there is hope of getting clearer guidance into these plans to contextualize issues such as the political economy, conflict, or climate change; make the plans more based on risks and trends for each country and enforce a requirement for countries to do their due diligence.

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Radioactive Afghanistan

In following up a previous comment, asked for additional details on why Afghanistan and Iraq were radioactive and why they would overwhelm their resources?

To begin, he noted that there were many issues influencing this opinion. The big debate has been that since USAID is a development agency and not a stabilization agency, can it, as an aid agency, get involved in conflict? Is counterterrorism (CT) and countering violent extremism (CVE) the role of an aid agency? With such questions swirling, USAID/CMM was pulled into the conversation and started the development on a CVE document.

Efforts in Afghanistan (and Iraq) were unpopular with USAID personnel but it was an all-hands effort. Most Foreign Service Officers avoided Afghanistan and Iraq the best they could but, in the end, people were needed to start staffing the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs (OAPA). Additionally, postings in Afghanistan and Iraq were advertized as being able "fast-track" ones career and came with significant financial benefits.

We are a development agency. We are not set up to be a stabilization agency. The question was at what point does a development agency become active in a conflict environment. CMM got pulled into the Countering Violent Extremism because it had been working on the conflict assessment process. But most of my colleagues were doing anything they could to avoid going to Afghanistan or Iraq. It was advertised to them as being a fast track for the career. But we were advocates for conflict sensitivity and do no harm. We just thought what we had to offer would not be of much use in those places....Then S/CRS started with the ICAF process and we were instructed to start working a more closely with them. With ICAF there pull factors and push factors. Later they got into trying to develop an interagency doctrine on conflict assessment. This was a quagmire we didn't want to get involved in.

CMM had a lot of hesitation getting involved since they were the office of 'do no harm' and felt that idea didn't play well in Afghanistan or Iraq. On the other hand, some offices like the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) are more gung-ho.

ICAF

As a core component of implementing ICAF, CMM was both pulled into plans they were uncomfortable with and pushed to feeling like gunmen. At the same time, other independent efforts were ongoing. One such effort was undertaken by (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) who worked with CMM. (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) was trained on religious issues and went to Afghanistan to learn how to engage with moderates.

COIN and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)

USAID was briefed on the COIN manual early on and several expectations were built around the belief that if they [DOD] could provide benefits through development, they [DOD] could sway allegiances. This put a lot of pressure on development agencies and left them with two choices, both of which were problematic: 1) hand the responsibility to DOD; or 2) do it themselves. Both options put into the question the premise of COIN.

We were aware of the COIN model and we were briefed on the COIN manual when it came out. It wasn't very convincing but we didn't want to be sidelined. At the time the thinking was our choice was either to cede that role to the military or do it ourselves. We were caught between a rock and a hard place. The whole model [COIN] has been challenged since and seems to have fallen away.

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I never believed that the PRTs worked. While some in academia say the targeted activities were more effective than increasing the scale of CERP, more granular management from USAID, instead of DOD, may have had a greater impact.

CVE Paper and Evidence Summit

The CVE paper described the environments and the role of aid with respect to low level issues and persistent conflict; it also helped with understanding general dynamics. It looked at counter-narratives and how economic drivers sync with aid to increase effectiveness all while going upstream. When the conflict is open, CVE has limited value. CVE leads were David Hunsicker and Lisa [Shandeng?]. Dr. Walker's role in the CVE paper was ensuring the rigor of the analysis.

In September 2010, they held an Evidence Summit. The summit pulled together academic-wide body of knowledge and Dr. Walker will share the synthesis papers and agendas with the LL team.

LL-01 Work and Other Players

We explained that we are looking at indicators and have reviewed several reports including the 2008 CSIS study on a variety of conflict assessment models [Early Warning? A Review of Conflict Prediction Models and Systems]. Further, she explained that we are looking to see if we can recreate a picture and the changes in regard to security with violence and economic data. Data the LL-01 team does have from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) is very interesting and not based on regression. SIGAR will be working with the Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) project and with Dr. Jacob Shapiro and the policy workshop at Princeton to study the civilian surge.

He added that ESOC's best argument is the opening of data and that he sat on the first Minvera Grant award. He is fascinated by the work of Dr. Shapiro and Eli Berman and that USAID as an agency needs to be more attentive to the research being conducted by academia – one of his functions with CMM. SIGAR should talk to Dr. Joe Hewitt who was the Assistant Director of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the UofM and is not the USAID technical lead for CMM.

Why Conflict Assessment Matters for Strategy and Planning

Conflict sets countries back in terms of development by generations and anything we can do to head-off conflict is important. Conflict assessment also helps saves resources and time for the U.S. government. Conflict does not appear out of thin air. There are indicators in countries that can hint at conflict and we need to find those patterns and develop thoughtful analysis. With these things, there is a good chance we can manage conflict, limit escalation, save lives, and protect development investments. Conflict cycles are hard to break and most current conflicts are just a restart of older conflicts and that is something we didn't know back in 1998.

Now we have more academic examination and can do cross-national studies on state failure and instability. If we put all the countries on a spectrum with autocratic regimes on one end and fully democratic states on the other, you would see that both of the extremes are stable, it is those countries in the middle of the spectrum that are not stable. It's the transit from the authoritarian state to democracy that's where the trouble starts. Genocide is a continuation of that process.

USAID and the U.S. government are pushing democracy and governance but it will be difficult and it as countries are pushed toward democracy violence will increase. We need to ensure countries respond to needs and measures such as infant mortality rate are 1/10th as predictive as regime characteristics when it comes to forecasting genocide or the confrontation of different ideologies.

Improving corporate learning

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We do that by increasing awareness which is driven by open data initiatives, using the robust evaluation policy from 2010. Any data that is collected must be stored so it can eventually be public. Besides democracy and health surveys that have been little else opened. Data collection is project driven, not holistic and not cross-national.

Data Collection

Yes, data collection is vital and we also need a new view on conflict assessment. We [USAID] need money, (b)(3) to collect data and build databases. (b)(3). The Open Data initiatives have really helped. We have a very robust set of data and we have a very robust evaluation policy that says that any data we collect in evaluations has to be collected in a way that it can be distributed across the agencies and shared.

Value of Conflict Assessments (b)(3)

C. Rondeaux asked about the value of conflict assessment and the use of open versus classified data. She also noted the controversial nature of the (b)(3) assessments and how the USAID task force was good but (b)(3) had more data and money (b)(3)

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Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) and ICAF

Early on, S/CRS could have used independent judgments to focus. CMM set up consultations every six months with regional bureaus. They conducted two or three of these meetings then gave up because it was a bureaucratic knife-fight. (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

(b)(3) The higher ups said the high-risk places should be covered by S/CRS and USAID should be sent to other places like Comoros. S/CRS lost.

The USAID and S/CRS relations were bad and only worsened when S/CRS got into doctrine. S/CRS was bouncing around from topic to topic trying to justify their existence. One example was their work on the ICAF and it was painful. USAID's view was that interagency work was important and that the ICAF was, in the end, a good product and wanted S/CRS to use it but S/CRS wanted its own brand or to brand the CAF/ICAF. It was a long struggle to design the interagency product because there was so much squabbling. Eventually USAID, S/CRS, USIP, and PKSOI were sent to Carlisle [PA] and told they couldn't leave until they created the ICAF...also dubbed the "Treaty of Carlisle".

C/CRS tried several times [to create a product similar to ICAF] but USAID would reject it and then repeat the cycle. S/CRS did one field trial under (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C). The chief of strategy at S/CRS kept pushing ICAF ideas and S/CRS wanted to claim that space, not assess its effectiveness of conflict assessment. At this point, USAID was told to play nicer so they ended up spending time to create ICAF. ICAF was two days of work.

Cambodia & ICAF

ICAF was a net improvement over CAF V1.0. ICAF was tried as a joint effort in Cambodia which was co-led by (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) and a junior military partner. The military already had its own tool and outside squabble. CAF was usually two people, ICAF was about 15 people. The Cambodia ICAF

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took about four months to setup and as part of the preparation, USIP set of a roundtable, or a "watchers group" on conflict dynamics.

The Cambodia ICAF was a success analytically. The teams were divided by issues: security, political, econ/social. Each had one team lead and one person from DoS, USAID, the Cambodian Embassy, and the military. USAID and DoS were challenged to get broader embassy community buy-in which was problematic as they needed translators. The U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia [**Ambassador Carol A. Rodley**] only helped because she was ordered to and she expected no surprises from the assessment, thus she gave almost no resources.

At the end of the assessment and at the end of the final presentation to the Ambassador she had changed her mind and was a full convert.

The first big takeaway was the systemic point of view. The team used a series of systems diagrams for the out-brief and packaged the insights like she had not seen before. (b)(3). (b)(6). (b)(7)(C) [REDACTED] also helped and is now using the systems tools generally.

The second big finding was that there was no evidence of the Chams, a Muslim group indigenous to Cambodia, providing fighters to go fight in Iraq despite PACOM [United States Pacific Command] claims that they were. The ICAF team demanded the proof from DOD about where their judgments came from. (b)(3) [REDACTED] the DOD only provided information on a few meetings and they were slim. There was no evidence of radicalization. The IC continued to maintain that they had evidence, but would not share it. After this, conflict assessments dropped off cycle.

End of S/CRS and the Surge

S/CRS was expensive and time-consuming. Their value-add was declining and functioned mainly as an interagency facilitator. S/CRS did use ICAF to chat. It was used not for analysis but to build a consensus on issues. USAID hated this use of ICAF as it did no analysis and did not challenge assumptions. All S/CRS wanted to do with ICAF was use it to have discussions. With this in mind CMM told the missions not to do ICAF because it was dangerous. The CAF V2.0 then came out and CMM offered that to the missions instead. S/CRS then died as it had no reason to exist.

S/CRS was initially structured to fail and at the end it only made life horrible for everybody else. That said, the military did like S/CRS because they needed civilians to start planning and wanted to import civilian models and civilian doctrine.

After [USAID Administrator Andrew] Natsios but before Rajiv Shah, USAID was vulnerable. S/CRS wanted their civilian surge models written and USAID's planning suited USAID's goals - one instance of when this was clear was the civilian surge. USAID already had a surge capacity with their implementing partners but that was a different civilian surge model. USAID resisted the military's pull into the civilian surge for about seven or eight months then it all quieted down.